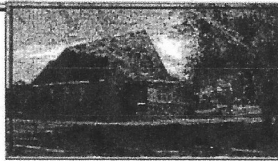


History of St Vincent De Paul, Milford

Tracing back to the original owners of the site on which the church stands suggests that it was included in the large area of land a Mr Shakespeare probably bought from the Hobson government and then sub-divided it in 1843. The sub-division (lot 89) which included the site now occupied by Carmel College was purchased by the Poynting family (well-known Catholics) in 1844. Lot 87 on which St Vincent de Paul Church now stands was also purchased in 1844 by a Joseph Wright. I can find no record showing how the site subsequently changed hands; the Auckland Catholic Diocese is shown as the owner since formal records of land transfers began. It may be that the site was either sold or gifted to the Church by the Wright family.



Takapuna was separated out from Devonport as a new parish in 1917. After WW1, as a transport from the Devonport and Bayswater ferries developed, Milford became a popular place for Aucklanders to live and to relax at the beach with its enclosed sea water swimming pool, pirate ship, cafes and local shops. Houses began to spread out rapidly in the paddocks along the roads and the Catholic population grew to the extent that Sunday Masses were held in the Picturedrome cinema at Milford using a portable altar made by Ken Derrick's father. There were few cars around and most people walked to Mass. By 1940 the population growth projections for the area covered by St Joseph's Parish prompted Parish Priest Monsignor J J Kelly to make a case to the Bishop to build a church in Milford on the corner site at the junction of Shakespeare/ Kitchener Rds and Fenwick Ave. The area around was rapidly developing with houses and shops.

Over the next decade, parishioners and non-Catholics contributed greatly in kind and in materials towards the building of the church. The new church was eventually approved by the Bishop and building commenced in 1949, the architect being Mr George Tole and the builder Mr Peterson. It was built to last in traditional brick style of almost cruciform shape, in size almost as large as the then wooden Parish church of St Joseph's. The church features a high gabled roof, fluted pillars supporting a high arch to the altar, many small semi-stained glass side windows and the maximum area for seating the congregation. The church which was named

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the old Stewart house was sold and the present house purchased by the appointed trustees to provide the retired priest with a residence near to the church. The first priest to take up residence was Monsignor Hyde in 1982. He was followed by Rev Fr J Foley from 1985 until 1992; then came Rev Fr J van Tilborg until 2001. The present Rev Fr David Whelan took up residence in 2002.

With the privilege of a resident priest, the number of services increased at St Vincent's and gradually the popularity of the Church began to grow again. Mons Hyde started the trend during his comparatively short stay; Fr Joe Foley is remembered for his 'unusual' homilies, his readiness to invite young children on to the altar and his 'dislike' of the altar canopy which he called a 'bedstead'. Fr John van Tilborg particularly increased the weekday Mass congregations by introducing Rosary and Prayers for Vocations, daily prayers which have continued to this day.

Early in 2001 when Fr John van Tilborg's illness made it difficult for him to continue to organise the day to day activities in the church, a Milford Coordination Group was formed by five Milford parishioners to provide support and help for Fr John. As Fr John's health deteriorated, the MCG (as the group became known) gradually assumed responsibility through its monthly meetings for all organisational and administration tasks concerned with the church functions.



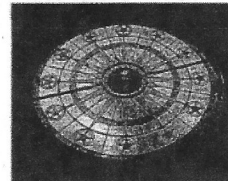
With the coming of our present retired priest Fr David Whelan, the MCG has continued to date to work closely with Fr David, the Parish Priest and his staff. During its six years of work, the MCG, often in cooperation with Parish Maintenance Manager Dale Noye, has initiated large number of improvements to the services and facilities provided for the Milford community at St Vincent's.

Whilst the new church became a great centre for worship in Milford, its design and location are not without problems. It has inadequate space for sacristy tasks, storage and no space or facility for any after-Mass social activity. For much of its 56 years of life the church has been invariably full to overflowing at Sunday Masses. I suspect that the building was and still is the maximum size allowed under Council Planning regulations on that site. Originally designed with a seating capacity of 281, over the years it became

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St Vincent de Paul by Monsignor Kelly was dedicated by Bishop James Michael Liston on 18 December 1949.

The Blessing and Consecration Mass was subsequently held by the Bishop and Monsignor Kelly in the presence of 15 or more clergy including the Rev Fr Buckley of the St Vincent de Paul Society, James McLean the Society's President and a congregation of nearly 600 people mostly seated outside. The first Missal to be used in the church was also donated by the Derrick family. In due course as Milford grew, St Vincent's became known as the Village church. A striking feature of the church is the 1.2 metre diameter stained glass window depicting the Holy Eucharist, located in the gable of the north facing end of the building. In due course, to support its name, the church was gifted a statue of Saint Vincent de Paul which sits on a plinth on the inside wall below the stained glass window.



Capacity congregations quickly outgrew the Sunday (280) of the new church and the Parish Priest resorted to asking people to use their cars if necessary to attend Mass at St Joseph's. With the opening of the new St Joseph's Parish Church in 1966 and as more people were able to afford cars, Mass numbers at St Vincent's levelled and even diminished.

Over the next two decades St Vincent's settled more in the shadow of the new Parish Church, but remained the centre for worship for many older parishioners who lived within easy distance of the Church. Regular Sunday Masses, weekday Masses on selected special days were maintained by the Parish priests. Because of its size and location, the Church became much in demand for weddings and baptisms. During this period, day to day care of the church became more dependent on a few willing parishioners who lived nearby: some names come to mind are the Derricks, Joe O'Rourke, the Emans, Joe Regan and the Olivers. More than likely there are others who were much involved and I apologise for any omissions.

In 1982 a parishioner named Noella Stewart bequeathed her house to the church as a home for retired priests. With the Milford church in mind, when a house in Fenwick Av became available later that year,

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apparent that the pews designed to seat eight could in fact only take seven people - perhaps due to a gradual increase in the birth of parishioners! In 1998, because of complaints about the lack of leg room, one row of pews were removed which, allowing for seven per pew reduced the seating capacity to its present 210.

Currently, Mass attendances on weekdays vary from 40 to 70 and on Sundays the church is invariably full with 30 plus of the congregation in the vestibule or outside. The increasing numbers at Mass has over the years brought many more vehicles: parking became a significant problem particularly on weekdays when Milford public parks are full. As pressure on the church parking area grew, access to the church entrance became more impeded requiring the erection of bollards to keep cars away. With increasing pressure on drainage in the Wairau Valley area, the low lying site also brought flooding during heavy rains, causing problems of access to the Church entrance. There were odd occasions when people attending services were forced to 'walk the plank' to enter the church! Finally, in line with deteriorating standards in this country, the church has been robbed of all six of its copper drainage down pipes during the last two years!

During the last decade the congregation has been swelled by a significant number of Asian parishioners of various nationalities. These folk have merged extremely well with the Milford community and many take an active part in the various Ministry and other duties involved with the functioning of St Vincent's.

In summary, the inspiration of Monsignor Kelly and his Parish begun as early as 1940, resulted in a gracious and permanent centre for worship for Catholics and other faiths that live in the Milford area.

Despite its problems, St Vincent de Paul Church gratefully served by its resident retired priest, has continued to provide a quiet haven of peace and a witness for Christianity in the centre of a bustling suburb, attracting growing numbers of people to worship at its services.

Ken Miles



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